CLAIMS

We claim:

1. A method for communicating object data comprising:

generating a hash value based on object data representing a user of a local computer;

storing the object data at a storage location; and

returning an object name having the hash value and a location identifier identifying the storage location, the object name enabling a user of a remote computer to access the object data.

2. A method as recited in claim 1 further comprising:

receiving a request for the object data, the request including the object name; and

retrieving the object data from a local cache based on the hash value.

3. A method as recited in claim 1 further comprising:

receiving a request for the object data, the request including the object name; and

in response to receiving the request, retrieving the object data from the location using the location identifier.

4. A method as recited in claim 1 further comprising:

receiving a request for the object data, the request including the object name; and

determining whether the requested object data is in a local cache based on the hash value; and

if the requested object data is in the local cache, retrieving the object data from the local cache,

otherwise, retrieving the requested object data from the location identified by the location identifier.

5. A method as recited in claim 4 wherein the retrieving the requested object data from the location identified by the location identifier comprises:

retrieving the requested object data from network storage.

6. A method as recited in claim 4 wherein the retrieving the requested object data from the location identified by the location identifier comprises:

retrieving the requested object data from a local file system.

7. A method as recited in claim 4 wherein the retrieving the requested object data from the location identified by the location identifier comprises:

retrieving the requested object data from a remote file system.

8. A method as recited in claim 7 wherein the retrieving the requested object data from a remote file system comprises:

accessing the remote file system via a peer-to-peer connection.

9. A method as recited in claim 7 wherein the retrieving the requested object data from a remote file system comprises:

accessing the remote file system via a connection through a switchboard server.

10. A computer-readable medium having stored thereon computer-executable instructions for performing a method comprising:

receiving a name associated with a user on a remote computer, the name including location data and a hash value uniquely associated with a data object representing the user; and

retrieving the data object from one of a local cache based on the hash value or a location identified by the location data.

11. A computer-readable medium as recited in claim 10 wherein the retrieving the data object from one of a local cache based on the hash value or a location identified by the location data comprises:

determining whether the data object is in a local cache based on the hash value; and

if the data object is in the local cache, retrieving the data object from the local cache;

otherwise, retrieving the data object from the location identified by the location data.

12. A computer-readable medium as recited in claim 11 wherein the retrieving the data object from the location identified by the location data comprises retrieving the data object from a remote file system.

13. A computer-readable medium as recited in claim 11 wherein the retrieving the data object from the location identified by the location data comprises retrieving the data object from a local file system.

14. A computer-readable medium as recited in claim 11 wherein the retrieving the data object from the location identified by the location data comprises retrieving the data object from a network storage.

15. A computer-readable medium as recited in claim 11 wherein the retrieving the data object from the location identified by the location data comprises accessing a remote computer via a peer-to-peer connection.

16. A system for managing objects representing users in an instant messaging conversation, the system comprising:

a data object representing a user, the data object having an object name including a location identifier and a hash value, the object name allowing; and

an object store operable to retrieve the data object from a location identified by the location identifier and store the data object in a local cache based on the hash value.

17. A system as recited in claim 16 wherein the object name further comprises a creator identifier identifying a creator of the data object.

18. A system as recited in claim 16 further comprising a transport protocol stack enabling the object store to retrieve the data object from a remote storage location over a peer-to-peer connection.

19. A system as recited in claim 16 wherein the data object further comprise metadata descriptive of the data object.

20. A system as recited in claim 19 wherein the metadata comprises:

a friendly name field;

a type field indicating a type of data object; and

a hash value based on the metadata.

21. A system as recited in claim 16 wherein the location identifier comprises a uniform resource locator (URL).

22. A system as recited in claim 16 wherein the location identifier comprises a uniform resource identifier (URI).